JC490 U.S. PTO
05/25/99

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PTO/SB/05 (12/97)
Approved for use through 09/30/00. OMB 0651-0032
Patent and Trademark Office: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No.	6748 US
Total Pages	22
First Named Inventor or Application Identifier	ANIL M. MURCHING
Express Mail Label No.	EL312733939US

ADDRESS TO: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Box Patent Application, Washington, DC 20231

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09/318682
05/25/99

APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

1. [X] Fee Transmittal Form (Submit an original, and a duplicate for fee processing)
2. [X] Specification [Total Pages 13] (preferred arrangement set forth below)
   - Descriptive title of the Invention
   - Cross References to Related Applications
   - Statement Regarding Fed sponsored R & D
   - Reference to Microfiche Appendix
   - Background of the Invention
   - Brief Summary of the Invention
   - Brief Description of the Drawings (if filed)
   - Detailed Description
   - Claim(s)
   - Abstract of the Disclosure
3. [X] Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) [Total Sheets 4]
4. Oath or Declaration [Total Pages 3]
   - a. [X] Newly executed (original or copy)
   - b. [ ] Copy from a prior application (37 CFR 1.63(d)) (for continuation/divisional with Box 17 completed) [Note Box 5 below]
     - i. [ ] DELETION OF INVENTOR(S) Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application, see 37 CFR 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).
5. [ ] Incorporation By Reference (useable if Box 4b is checked) The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which a copy of the oath or declaration is supplied under Box 4b, is considered as being part of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is hereby incorporated by reference therein.
6. [ ] Microfiche Computer Program (Appendix)
7. Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission (if applicable, all necessary)
   - a. [ ] Computer Readable Copy
   - b. [ ] Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
   - c. [ ] Statement verifying identity of above copies

ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

8. [ ] Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))
9. [ ] 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement (when there is an assignee) [ ] Power of Attorney
10. [ ] Englisn Translation Document (if applicable)
11. [ ] Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 [ ] Copies of IDS Citations
12. [ ] Preliminary Amendment
13. [X] Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503) (Should be specifically itemized)
14. [ ] Small Entity Statement(s) [ ] Statement filed in prior application, Status still proper and desired
15. [ ] Certified Copy of Priority Document(s) (if foreign priority is claimed)
16. [ ] Other: ....

17. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, check appropriate box and supply the requisite information:

[ ] Continuation [ ] Divisional [ ] Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No: ______/______

18. CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

[ ] Customer Number or Bar Code Label (Insert Customer No. or Attach bar code label here) or [X] Correspondence address below

NAME	Francis I. Gray				
	TEKTRONIX, INC.				
ADDRESS	MS 50-LAW				
	P.O. Box 500				
CITY	Beaverton	STATE	Oregon	ZIP CODE	97077
COUNTRY	USA	TELEPHONE	503 627-7261	FAX	503 627-7119

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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

KALMAN TRACKING OF COLOR OBJECTS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the processing of video image sequences, and more particularly to a semi-automatic method for Kalman tracking of color objects within the video image sequence.

With the advent of digital television and the resulting large bandwidth requirements for baseband video signals, compression techniques become ever more important. The currently accepted standard for television compression that provides the most compression while still resulting in acceptable decoded images is the MPEG-2 standard. This standard compresses an image using one of three types of compressed frames — an independently compressed frame, a predictively compressed frame and a bi-directional predictively compressed frame. This standard operates on the images as a whole.

However the content of images may be composed of several objects, such as tennis players and a ball, in front of a background, such as spectators. It is posited that if the objects (tennis players and ball) are separated out from the background (spectators), then the objects may be compressed separately for each frame, but the background only needs to be compressed once since it is relatively static. To this effect many techniques have been proposed for separating objects from the

background, as indicated in the recently published proposed MPEG-7 standard.

Just separating the objects is not sufficient — the objects need to be tracked throughout a given sequence of images that make up a scene. What is desired is a method for tracking objects within a video image sequence.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly the present invention provides Kalman tracking of color objects within a video image sequence. Objects are separated on the basis of color using a color separator, and a user identifies an object or objects of interest. The object(s) are tracked using a Kalman prediction algorithm to predict the location of the centroid of the object(s) in successive frames, with the location being subsequently measured using a mass density function and then filtered to provide a smooth value for centroid location and velocity. If one of the assumptions for the tracking algorithm fails, then an error recovery scheme is used based upon the assumption that failed, or the user is asked to re-initialize in the current frame.

The objects, advantages and other novel features of the present invention are apparent from the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the appended claims and attached drawing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

Fig. 1 is a basic block diagram view of an algorithm for Kalman tracking of color objects according to the present invention.

Fig. 2 is an illustrative view for separating objects by color according to the present invention.

Fig. 3 is an illustrative view of the final separation by color according to the present invention.

Fig. 4 is an illustrative view of Kalman prediction of an object centroid from frame to frame according to the present invention.

Fig. 5 is an illustrative view of one type of failure of the tracking algorithm requiring error recovery according to the present invention.

Fig. 6 is an illustrative view of a search pattern for locating the object shown in Fig. 5 according to the present invention.

Fig. 7 is a more detailed block diagram view of the Kalman tracking algorithm according to the present invention.

Fig. 8 is an illustrative view of developing an alpha map for error recovery according to the present invention.

Fig. 9 is an illustrative view of defining the object around the predicted centroid as part of error recovery according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In performing semi-automatic tracking of colored objects in a given

video image sequence, a user indicates in one or more key frames a set of one or more colored objects. The user also indicates other regions of significant size and different colors in the video image sequence. The objects are separated based upon color, and a tracking algorithm then tracks the movements of the indicated objects over time through the video image sequence. This tracking is achieved by associating a Kalman tracking model to each object. The basic algorithm is shown in Fig. 1.

An input video image sequence is input to a color segmentation algorithm, such as that described in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/270,233 filed March 15, 1999 by Anil Murching et al entitled "Histogram-Based Segmentation of Objects from a Video Signal Via Color Moments". This algorithm uses a hierarchical approach using color moment vectors. The color segmentation algorithm segments the images in the input video image sequence into regions/classes of uniform color properties. Then a Kalman tracking algorithm is applied to each of the segmented objects to produce object "tracks" from one frame to the next of the video image sequence.

As shown in Fig. 2 color segmentation is performed using key rectangles that the user places within different objects of interest, as well as other regions that have significant size and are different in color from the objects. If there are a total of N_u different colors indicated by the user, then the color segmentation algorithm classifies each small block PxQ (P=Q=2 pixels, for example) of each frame of the input video image

sequence into one among the N_u classes or into a "garbage" class. Kalman tracking may be thought of as a post-processing operation on this segmentation result.

Kalman tracking applies a Newtonian motion model to the centroids of the objects of interest. As an example, the objective is to track object #K in Fig. 3, whose location in the starting frame I_0 of the input video image sequence is identified by the user. Object #K belongs to color model #A while a different object #L belongs to color model #B. The user "clicks" on the estimated location of the centroid (geometric center) of the object #K. The Kalman state vector at time "n" is:

$$\zeta_k[n] \triangleq \begin{vmatrix} x_k[n] \\ y_k[n] \\ v_{xk}[n] \\ v_{yk}[n] \end{vmatrix}$$

where (x_k,y_k) are the location coordinates of the centroid for object #K, and (v_{xk},v_{yk}) are the velocity components of object #K. The Newtonian motion model for all objects assumes that acceleration is a white-noise process. This motion model is well known in the art and may be found in the literature on Kalman filtering.

With this motion model a state-transition equation becomes:

$$\zeta_k[n+1] = \underline{F}\ \zeta_k[n] + \underline{G}\ \eta_k^s[n]$$

where $\underline{F}$ and $\underline{G}$ are vector constants and $\eta_k^s[n]$ is a stationary, independent, white noise vector with mean: $E\{\eta_k^s[n]\} = \underline{0}$.

A correlation vector bandwidth $\underline{R}_k^s = E\{\underline{\eta}_k^s[n]\underline{\eta}_k^s[m]^T\} = | \sigma_{xk}^2, 0; 0, \sigma_{yk}^2 |$. The noise variances are estimated from the input video sequence.

Through tracking, the position of the centroid of the object #K in the next frame is measured, so:

$$\underline{\Psi}_k[n+1] = \underline{H}\, \zeta_k[n+1] + \underline{\eta}_k^o[n+1]$$

where $\underline{\eta}_k^o[n]$ is the stationary, independent, observation noise vector with means equal to $\underline{0}$, and $\underline{H}$ is a vector constant. Again there is a correlation vector $\underline{R}_k^o$ with noise variances that are estimated.

In steady state tracking the object #K has been tracked to frame I_n and its position and velocity are known. From this point the first step is Kalman prediction. To locate the object #K in frame I_{n+1}

$$(\text{Predicted})\zeta_k'[n+1 \mid n] = \underline{F}\ (\text{filtered})\zeta_k''[n \mid n]$$

The first two entries in $\zeta_k'[n+1 \mid n]$ give the predicted position of the centroid in frame I_{n+1}. Segment PxQ blocks of I_{n+1} into the many colors and identify all the blocks that belong to color model #A — object #K has this color. Then starting from the predicted position, extract a connected set of PxQ blocks that all belong to the color model #A.

The set of connected blocks identified in the first step constitute the desired detection/tracking of the object of interest in frame I_{n+1}. The second step is to measure the centroid position, performed by:

$$_{\Psi}x_k[n+1] = \Sigma x_k Y_k / \Sigma Y_k$$

$$_{\Psi}y_k[n+1] = \Sigma y_k Y_k / \Sigma Y_k$$

where Y is luminance data in frame I_{n+1}. Calculate the centroid position

by using luminance as a "mass density" function. This improves the robustness of the tracking algorithm. Either of the color components may also be used as mass density functions.

Both the measurement and prediction steps are susceptible to noise, so a third step is to filter/smooth the state information. The familiar Kalman filtering equations are used:

$$\zeta_k''[n+1 \mid n] = \zeta_k'[n+1 \mid n] + \Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n]\underline{H}^T(\underline{H}\,\Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n]\underline{H}^T + \underline{R}_k^{0})^{-1} * (\Psi_k[n+1] - \underline{H}\,\zeta_k'[n+1 \mid n])$$

$$\Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n+1] = \Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n] - \Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n]\underline{H}^T(\underline{H}\,\Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n]\underline{H}^T + \underline{R}_k^{0})^{-1} * \underline{H}^T\,\Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n]$$

$$\Sigma_k[n+1 \mid n] = \underline{F}\,\Sigma_k[n \mid n]\underline{F}^T + \underline{G}\,\underline{R}_k^{s}\underline{G}^T$$

From these equations the filtered/smoothed position and velocity of the centroid of object #K in frame I_{n+1} are obtained. The same process is repeated for each succeeding frame.

For the initialization of the process the position of the centroid in frame I_0, $\zeta_k''[0 \mid 0]$, is determined. The user "clicks" near the visually estimated geometric center of the object #K, and that point serves as the initial position. The initial velocity is set to zero. Then vales for $\underline{R}_k^{s}$, $\underline{R}_k^{o}$ and $\Sigma_k[0 \mid 0]$ are determined experimentally and used to determine the centroid position. One such set is

$\underline{R}_k^{s} = |2.0, 0; 0, 8.0|$; $\underline{R}_k^{o} = |1, 0; 0, 2|$; $\Sigma_k[0 \mid 0] = |1.6, 0, 0, 0; 0, 3.2, 0, 0; 0, 0, 2.0, 0; 0, 0, 0, 4.0|$

Although the above equations ostensibly give the predicted position of the centroid of object #K in the new frame I_{n+1}, it is possible that these

coordinates lie outside the image field of view. This is easily detected and is an indication to the user that the object of interest has exited the field of view, which is a perceptually significant event. In the algorithm above use the last known "good" position and attempt to delete the object in frame I_{n+1} at that location. If successful, the algorithm continues. Otherwise the algorithm prompts the user to either (a) verify that the object has left the field of view, and hence stop tracking it, or (b) re-initialize at frame I_{n+1} because the tracker model has broken down.

Sometimes, due to the geometric shape of the object or due to sudden changes in acceleration, the Kalman prediction points to a centroid location that is outside the boundary of the object #K, as shown in Fig. 5. This situation arises when the PxQ block that contains the predicted centroid position is classified by the color segmentation algorithm as belonging to a class other than color model #A. Again this situation is easily detected. To recover from this, search around a local neighborhood of the predicted centroid position. As shown in Fig. 6, begin at the PxQ block that contains the predicted centroid position and examine PxQ blocks in a spiral search pattern until one is found that belongs to color model #A. Then grow a connected region around this block and label it as object #K in frame I_{n+1}. The radius of the spiral search is a parameter that may be adjusted for each input video image sequence. If the objects of interest move slowly and are "convex" in shape, than a small search radius, such as a 5x5 neighborhood, is generally sufficient. If

there is very rapid and random motion, then a larger search range is desired.

The Kalman tracking algorithm is based upon the following assumptions: (I) objects of interest have regular shapes, i.e., cannot track spokes of a bicycle wheel as they are too "thin"; (ii) objects of interest have smooth color, i.e., no stripes or strange patterns; (iii) objects are moving "regularly", i.e., not Brownian motion of gas molecules; and (iv) objects do not occlude each other. When both the out of field of view and outside object boundary error recovery schemes described above fail, then the Kalman tracker is said to have failed. At this point one of the above assumptions has failed. The options at this point are (I) detect all connected regions in frame I_{n+1} that have color model #A, sort according to size/shape and try to locate the desired object #K among them, or (II) ask the user for help, i.e., prompt the user to re-initialize the tracking algorithm at frame I_{n+1}.

For option (I) the color segmentor outputs a segmentation map S_{n+1}. Each sample in S_{n+1} represents a spatially corresponding PxQ block of frame I_{n+1}. The value of the sample "n" is $\{0, 1, \ldots, N_u\}$, where $\{1, \ldots, N_u\}$ are the color models provided to the color segmentor and $\{0\}$ represents "garbage". The segmentation map is converted to a binary alpha map α_{n+1} by tagging all samples in S_{n+1} that have the same color model as object #K. Thus pixels in α_{n+1} have a value 255 if their corresponding PxQ block in I_{n+1} has the same color as object #K, and have a value of 0 otherwise. The

alpha map is fed to a “grow connections” algorithm along with the block coordinates of the predicted position of the centroid of object #K. The output is the desired connected region that is tagged as the object of interest. A simple error recovery scheme begins by detecting all connected regions in frame I_{n+1} that have the same color as object #K, and then selects the biggest one among them.

Thus the present invention provides for Kalman tracking of color objects in an input video image sequence by segmenting the image in the initial frame into a group of objects according to color, determining the position of the centroid of an object of interest and tracking the object through successive frames; and also provides some simple error recovery schemes if the object moves out of the field of view, the predicted centroid falls outside the boundaries of the object or the algorithm breaks down.

CLAIM OR CLAIMS

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of performing semi-automatic tracking of colored objects within a video image sequence comprising the steps of:

separating objects within an initial frame of the video image sequence on the basis of color;

identifying from the separated objects an object of interest having a centroid; and

tracking the object of interest through successive frames of the video image sequence using a Kalman predictive algorithm applied to the centroid.

2. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the tracking step comprises the steps of:

from the initial frame determining a position and velocity for the centroid;

for each successive frame predicting a position of the centroid;

from the predicted position extracting a connected group of blocks that belong to the object of interest;

measuring the position of the centroid in the successive frame from the connected group of blocks; and

smoothing the measured position and velocity of the centroid.

3. The method as recited in claim 1 further comprising the steps of:

detecting whether the centroid in the successive frame is within the object of interest and field of view; and

applying an error recovery scheme to re-identify the object of interest in the successive frame.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A semi-automatic method of tracking color objects in a video image sequence starts by separating the objects on the basis of color and identifying an object of interest to track. A Kalman predictive algotithm in used to predict the position of the centroid of the object of interest through successive frames. From the predicted position the actual centroid is measured and the position and velocity are smoothed using a Kalman filter. Error recovery is provided in the event the centroid falls outside the field of view or falls into an area of a different color, or in the event the tracking algorithm breaks down.

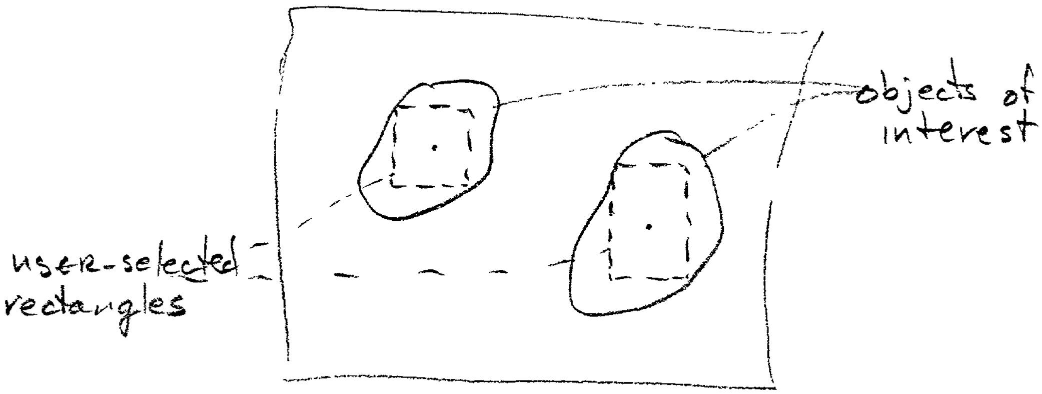


FIG. 2

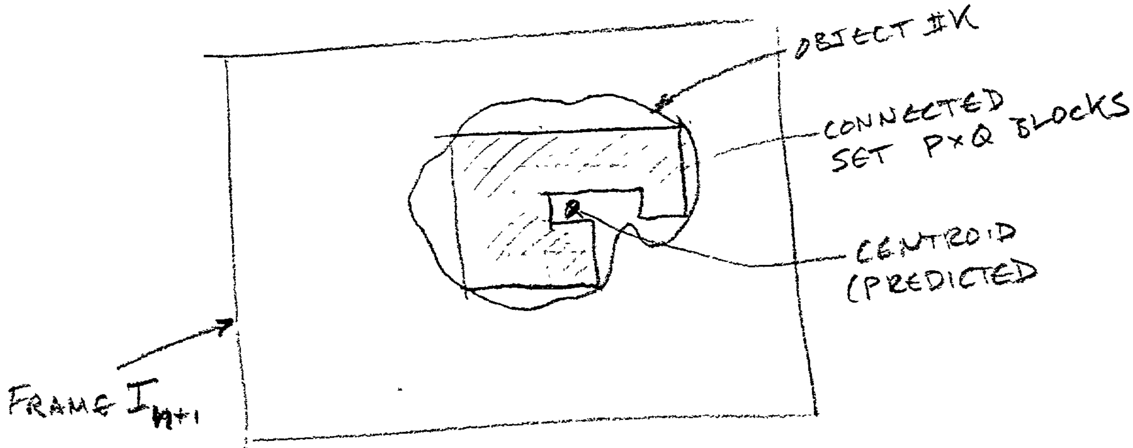


FIG. 5

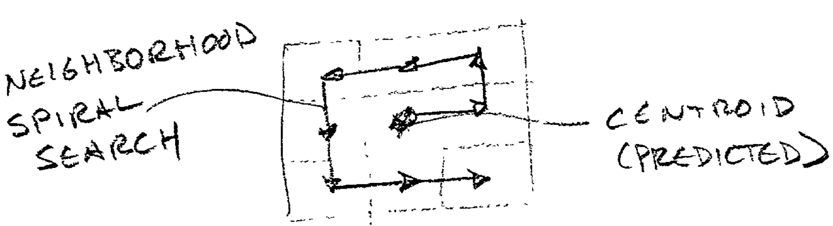


FIG. 6

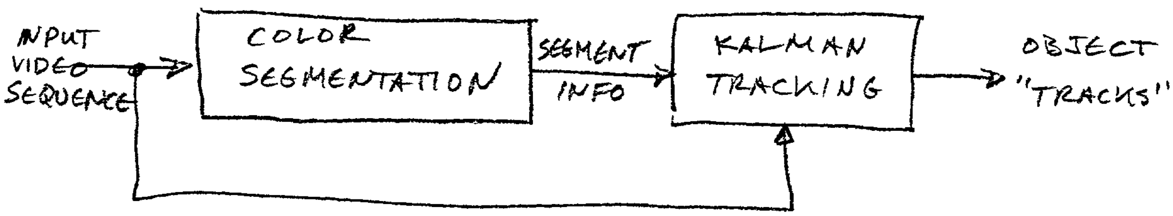


FIG. 2

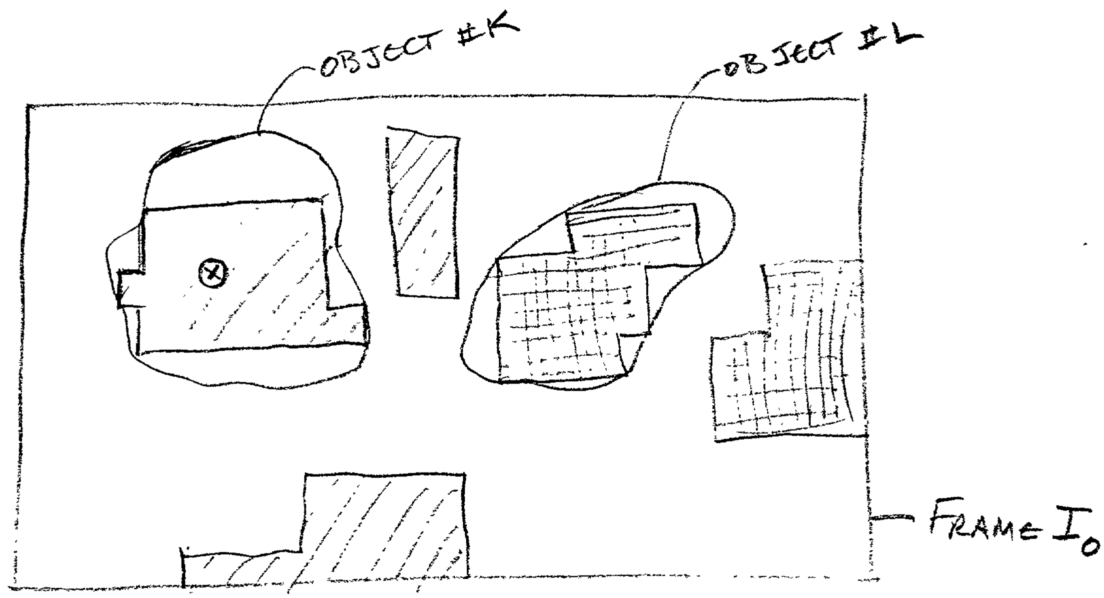
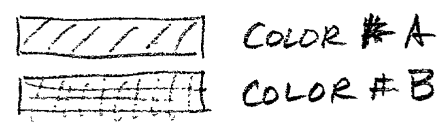


FIG. 3



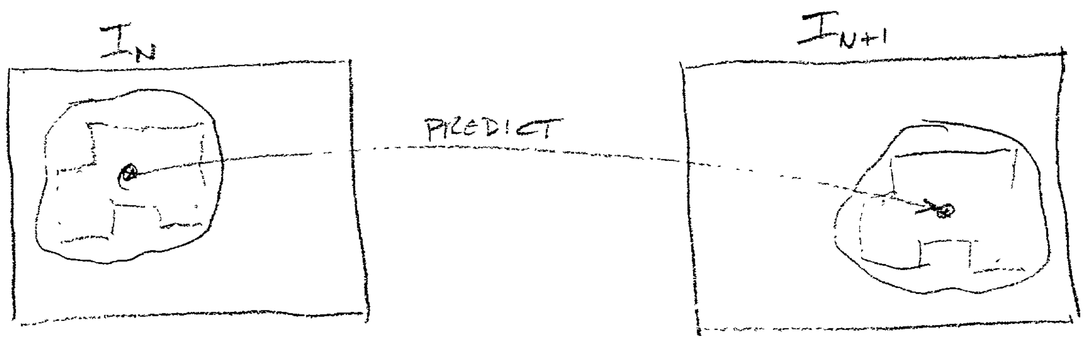


FIG. 4

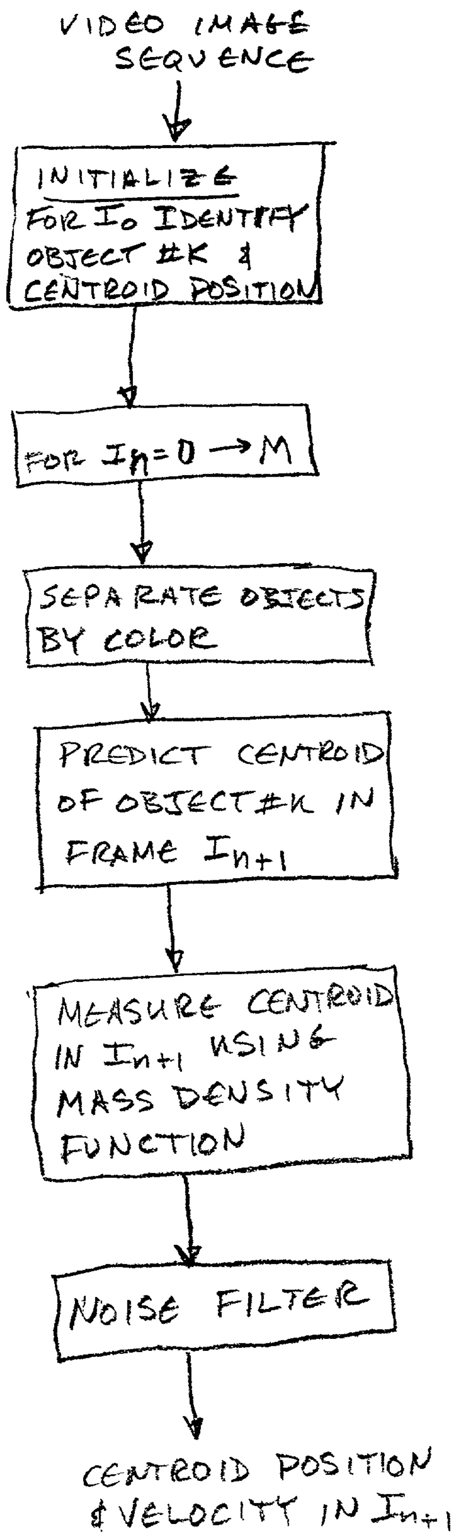

VIDEO IMAGE SEQUENCE
INITIALIZE
FOR I_0 IDENTIFY OBJECT #K & CENTROID POSITION
FOR $I_n = 0 \rightarrow M$
SEPARATE OBJECTS BY COLOR
PREDICT CENTROID OF OBJECT #K IN FRAME I_{n+1}
MEASURE CENTROID IN I_{n+1} USING MASS DENSITY FUNCTION
NOISE FILTER
CENTROID POSITION & VELOCITY IN I_{n+1}

FIG. 7.

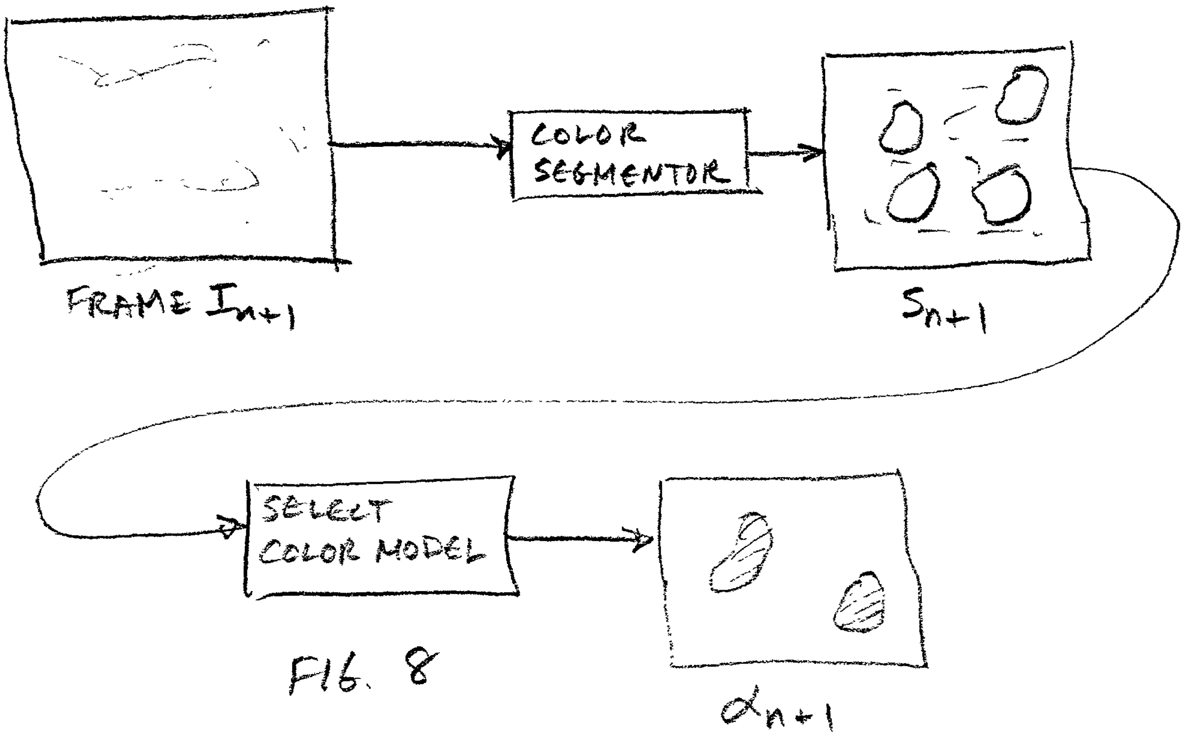

FRAME I_{n+1}
COLOR SEGMENTOR
S_{n+1}
SELECT COLOR MODEL
α_{n+1}

FIG. 8

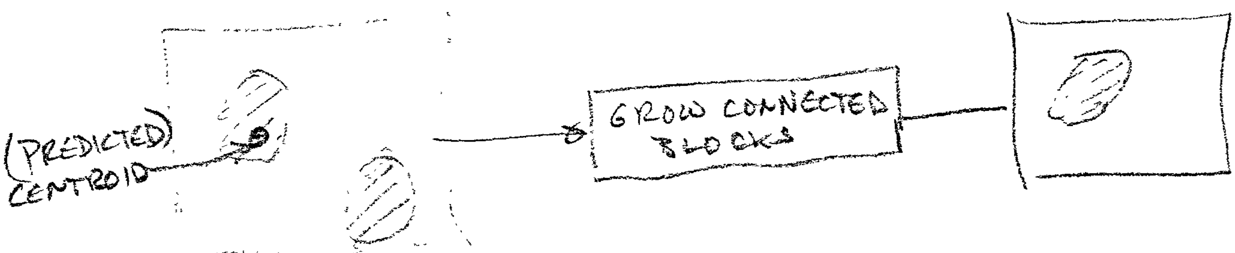

(PREDICTED) CENTROID
GROW CONNECTED BLOCKS

FIG. 9

Docket No.: 6748 US

DECLARATION FOR PATENT APPLICATION

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name.

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled: KALMAN TRACKING OF COLOR OBJECTS

the specification of which:
(check one)

X is attached hereto.
___ was filed on ___________, ______ as Application Serial No. ____________ and was amended on ______________ (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56(a).

I have identified below any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate from which I claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, Section 119 and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

Prior Foreign Application(s) — Priority Claimed

(Number)	(Country)	(Day/Month/Year Filed)	Yes	No
(Number)	(Country)	(Day/Month/Year Filed)	Yes	No

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of the above-identified specification is not disclosed in the prior United States application(s) in the matter required by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, Section 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose material information as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56(a) which occurred between the filing date of the prior application(s) and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

(Application Serial No.)	(Filing Date)	(Status-patented, pending, abandoned)
(Application Serial No.)	(Filing Date)	(Status-patented, pending, abandoned)

Docket No.: 6748 US

I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith:

William K. Bucher, Reg. No. 32,686; Ralph D'Alessandro, Reg. No. 28,838; Francis I. Gray, Reg. No. 27,788; Boulden G. Griffith, Reg. No. 32,804; Thomas F. Lenihan, Reg. No. 32,152; John D. Winkelman, Reg. No. 26,523; John Smith-Hill, Reg. No. 27,730. at telephone no. (503) 627-7262, P.O. Box 500, Delivery Station 50-LAW, Beaverton, Oregon 97077.

Address all telephone calls to Francis I. Gray at Telephone no. (503) 627-7261.

Address all correspondence to Francis I. Gray, Tektronix, Inc., P.O. Box 500, Delivery Station 50-LAW, Beaverton, Oregon 97077.

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

Full name of sole or first inventor ANIL M. MURCHING

Inventor's signature Anil M Murching Date 4/2/99

Residence Beaverton, Oregon Citizenship India

Address 930 S.W. 163rd Avenue, #335

Beaverton, Oregon 97006

Full name of second inventor THUMPUDI NAVEEN

Inventor's signature Naveen Date 4/2/99

Residence Beaverton, Oregon Citizenship India

Address 2679 N.W. 166th Terrace

Beaverton, Oregon 97006

Full name of third inventor RADU S. JASINSCHI

Inventor's signature Radu S. Jasinschi Date 4-2-99

Residence Portland, Oregon Citizenship Brazil

Address 14951 N.W. Fawnlily Drive

Portland, Oregon 97229

Docket No.: 6748 US

Full name of fourth inventor ALI TABATABAI

Inventor's signature ____________ Date 4/12/99

Residence Beaverton, Oregon Citizenship U.S.A.

Address 10495 S.W. 155th Avenue

Beaverton, Oregon 97007